

Our Northern California congressional district includes all or part of nine National Forests. These areas are an incredibly valuable asset to our state and nation. But regrettably, this important natural resource is in trouble. Inflexible environmental regulations that limit responsible forest management, have contributed to forests that are badly overgrown. Areas in Northern California that evolved historically to grow 50 or so trees per acre have as many as 10 times that amount today. While more trees might seem like a good thing, in reality it is not. Excessive forest fuels have created ideal conditions for catastrophic wildfire.

Far from the beneficial effects that low to moderate-temperature fires provide forest landscapes, catastrophic fires consume the whole forest, from floor to canopy, and burn at such high temperatures that the entire area is destroyed. Recent years have seen a significant spike of fires in our area that have caused significant damage and health issues associated with the smoke. I strongly support efforts to strategically thin out overgrown forest stands on a pace and scale that adequately address the serious forest health problem we face. Not only will thinning protect nearby communities, it will improve forest health, provide a stable source of employment for forested communities, generate revenue for county schools and roads, and protect local air and water quality.

The good news is that an example of how to manage western National Forests in a way that accomplishes these important goals already exists. In 1998, Congress enacted legislation I sponsored with Senator Dianne Feinstein. This bipartisan bill - the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group (QLG) Forest Recovery Act - is a groundbreaking forest health pilot project developed by a group of concerned citizens - local environmentalists, timber industry representatives, and county officials and community members. The QLG pilot program is designed to test the effects of a strategic thinning program on the Plumas, Lassen, and Tahoe National Forests. Though a small group of activists have thus far prevented its full implementation, QLG thinning projects that have been completed have shown that treated forest stands reduce the severity of fire and protect forest resources and neighboring communities.

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